DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Marc Elrich
County Executive

Christopher R. Conklin
Director

MEMORANDUM

March 14, 2025

TO: Artie Harris, Chair
Montgomery County Planning Board

FROM: Corey Pitts, Manager for Transportation Policy and Planning
Department of Transportation

SUBJECT: University Boulevard Corridor Plan
Public Hearing Draft – Department of Transportation Comments

Thank you for the opportunity to review the January 2025 Public Hearing Draft of the University Boulevard Corridor Plan. In addition to the attached detailed technical comments, we would like to highlight several significant issues. In the items below, footnotes identify the associated comment number in the attached detailed technical comments.

1) **TRANSIT LANES IN FOUR CORNERS:**[18,19,30] We strongly recommend that dedicated bus lanes be provided through Four Corners. Bus lanes are among our top priorities through Four Corners as this corridor already carries very high passenger volumes and provides important regional connectivity. Recent ridership data from WMATA shows ridership almost 40% above pre-pandemic levels. The County worked with the State to install dedicated bus lanes along the portion of University Boulevard between Amherst Avenue and Dennis Avenue. Extending these bus lanes through Four Corners will enhance the current investment in prioritizing transit along the corridor. These lanes will support other goals of the plan, including:

   - The higher densities proposed by the Plan's zoning are justified on the basis of high-quality bus services. Bus treatments are key for maintaining on-time performance and making transit a viable and desirable transportation option.

   - Without significant improvements to transit, driving will remain the mode of choice along the corridor, which will undermine the Plan's goals of improving multimodal safety, livability, walkability, and bikeability.

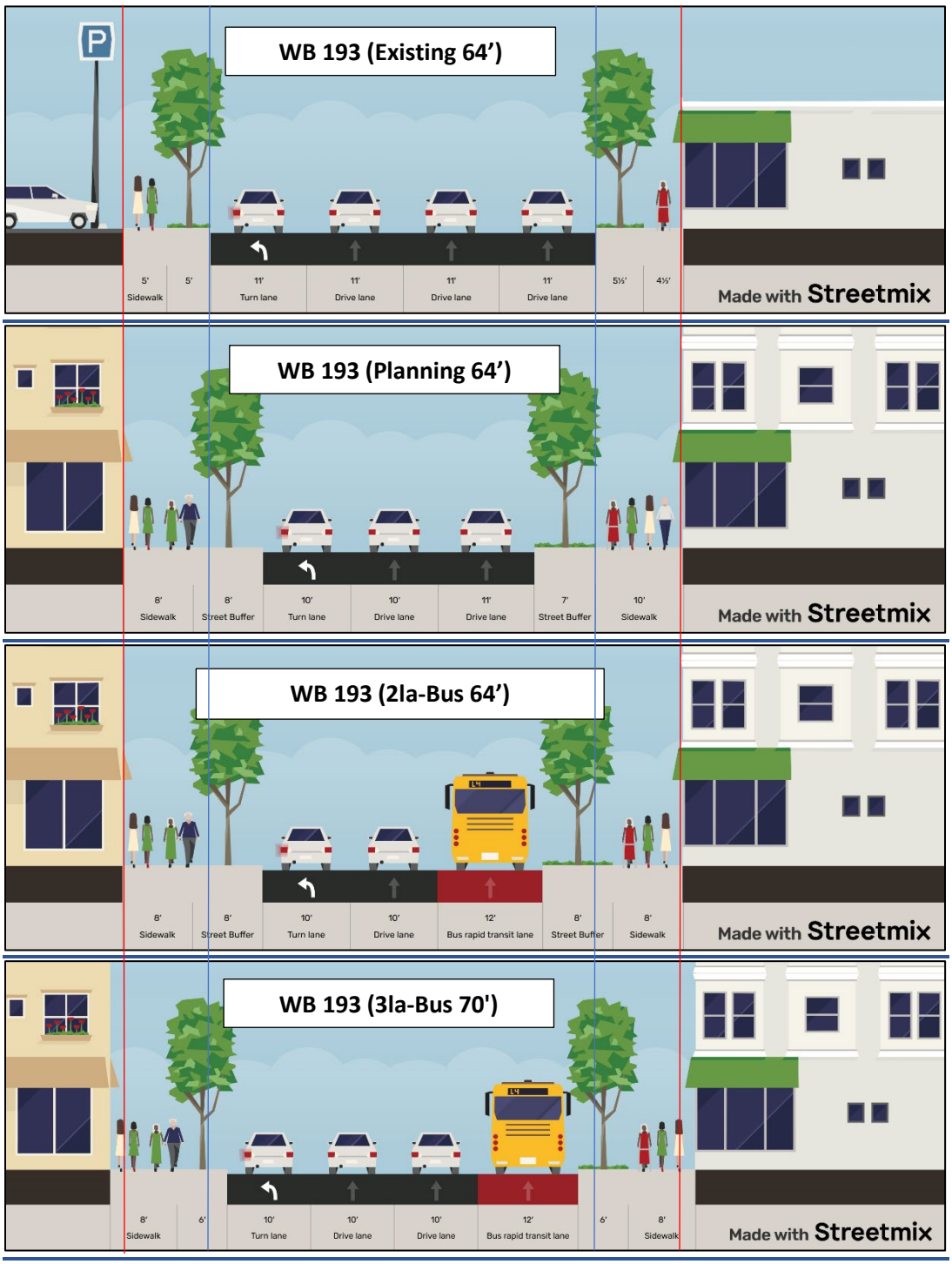
   - Transit lanes would boost the County's ability to meet the Plan Vision (p11) seeking to "leverage new transit infrastructure to reduce carbon emissions and advance the county's Climate Action Plan (CAP) goals", and also to support the Thrive Montgomery 2050 goal to "make transit the fastest, most convenient, and most reliable way to travel" to activity centers.

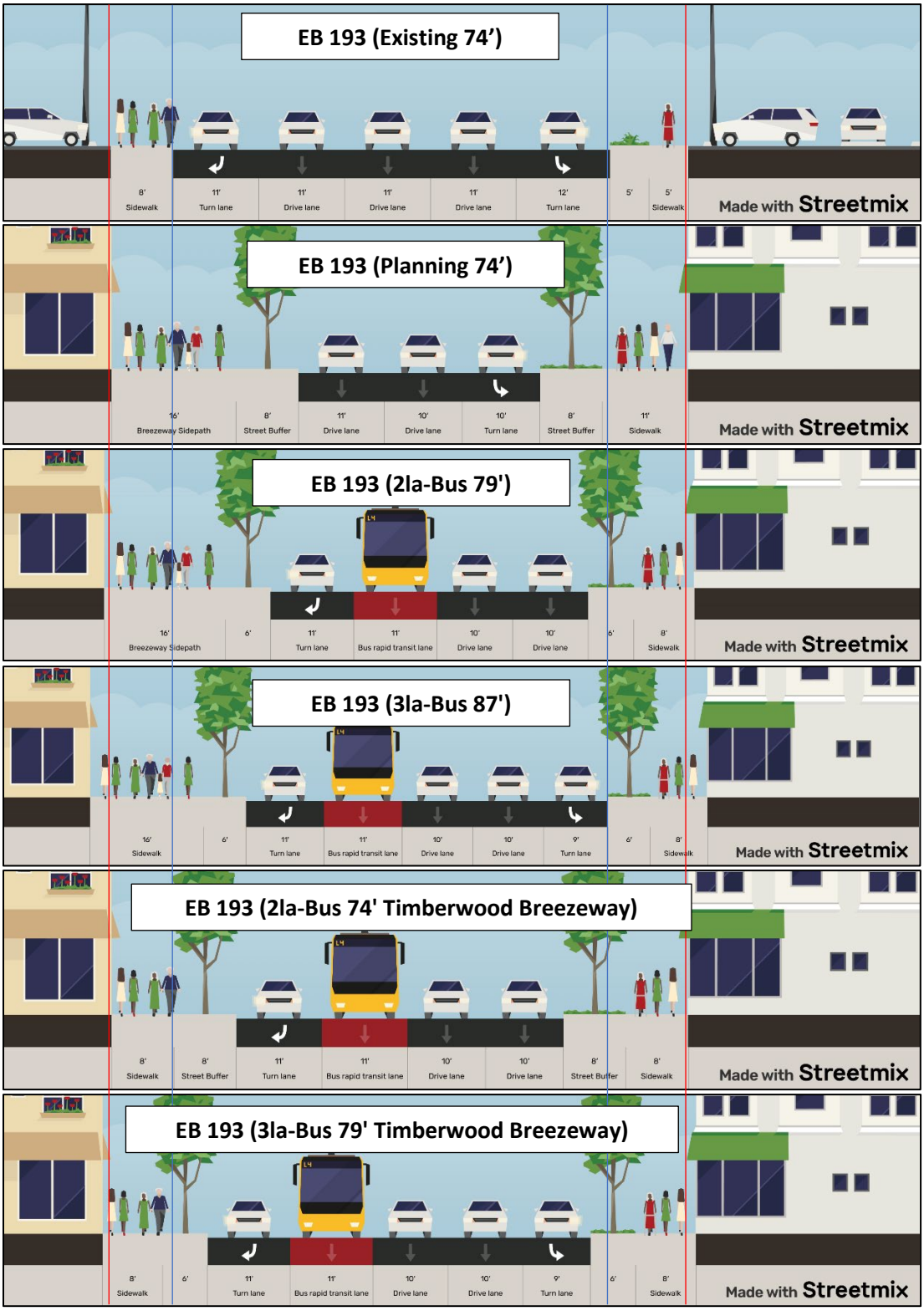
- Appendix H (Financial Feasibility Assessment) states that "Potential for Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) in the area may enhance attractiveness for higher-density projects if the service is robust and accessible," and the Partners for Economic Solutions study states that BRT's ability to promote development depends partly on "measurable speed advantages over driving alone (e.g., dedicated bus lanes)."

The cross-sections on the next two pages offer some potential options. In the westbound direction, our preference is for an additional bus lane necessitating +3' on each side of the rights-of-way. In the eastbound direction, our preference is for an additional bus lane and a dedicated right-turn lane (as to remove right-turns from the bus lane), necessitating +6.5' on each side of the rights-of-way.

Additional width beyond the existing rights-of-way can come from easements rather than dedication. While we appreciate the interest to keep the visual nature of the corridor narrowed as much as possible, we do not believe that the additional widths compromise this interest in our efforts to achieve other plan goals.

If necessary for additional space: consider potential bikeway options parallel to University Blvd which might accommodate Breezeway-level design parameters. One such option might use Timberwood Avenue, transitioning at the west through North Four Corners Local Park, and at the east via Pierce Dr / Lexington Dr. (shown in **blue** in the graphic below)

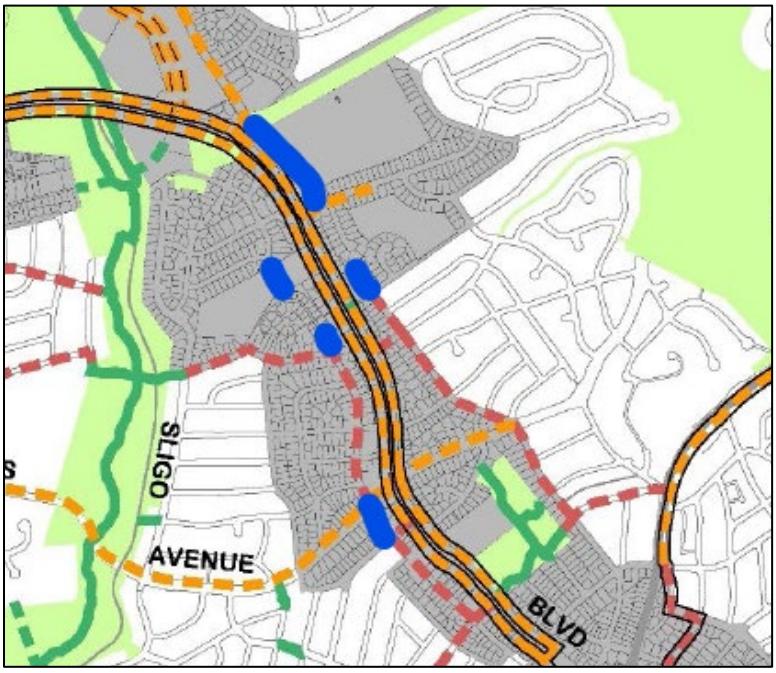

WB 193 (Existing 64')
5' Sidewalk
5'
11' Turn lane
11' Drive lane
11' Drive lane
11' Drive lane
5½'
4½'
Made with Streetmix
WB 193 (Planning 64')
8' Sidewalk
8' Street Buffer
10' Turn lane
10' Drive lane
11' Drive lane
7' Street Buffer
10' Sidewalk
Made with Streetmix
WB 193 (2la-Bus 64')
8' Sidewalk
8' Street Buffer
10' Turn lane
10' Drive lane
12' Bus rapid transit lane
8' Street Buffer
8' Sidewalk
Made with Streetmix
WB 193 (3la-Bus 70')
8' Sidewalk
6'
10' Turn lane
10' Drive lane
10' Drive lane
12' Bus rapid transit lane
6'
8' Sidewalk
Made with Streetmix


EB 193 (Existing 74')
8' Sidewalk
11' Turn lane
11' Drive lane
11' Drive lane
11' Drive lane
12' Turn lane
5'
5' Sidewalk
Made with Streetmix
EB 193 (Planning 74')
16' Breezeway Sidepath
8' Street Buffer
11' Drive lane
10' Drive lane
10' Turn lane
8' Street Buffer
11' Sidewalk
Made with Streetmix
EB 193 (2la-Bus 79')
16' Breezeway Sidepath
6'
11' Turn lane
11' Bus rapid transit lane
10' Drive lane
10' Drive lane
6'
8' Sidewalk
Made with Streetmix
EB 193 (3la-Bus 87')
16' Sidewalk
6'
11' Turn lane
11' Bus rapid transit lane
10' Drive lane
10' Drive lane
9' Turn lane
6'
8' Sidewalk
Made with Streetmix
EB 193 (2la-Bus 74' Timberwood Breezeway)
8' Sidewalk
8' Street Buffer
11' Turn lane
11' Bus rapid transit lane
10' Drive lane
10' Drive lane
8' Street Buffer
8' Sidewalk
Made with Streetmix
EB 193 (3la-Bus 79' Timberwood Breezeway)
8' Sidewalk
6'
11' Turn lane
11' Bus rapid transit lane
10' Drive lane
10' Drive lane
9' Turn lane
6'
8' Sidewalk
Made with Streetmix

2) **ZONING – TRANSPORTATION NEXUS:**[10] Consider some connection between expanded density and implementation of BRT, such as funding programmed within the 6-year CIP for construction of the master planned cross-section. This would help support the intended nexus of the Growth Corridor between density and non-auto mobility.

3) **PED-BIKE CONNECTIONS:**[33-36] Consider adding the following additional connections as ped/bike hard surface trails, with accompanying Shared Road & Trail bikeways following these paths parallel on each side of University Boulevard: *(shown in **blue** in the graphic below)*

- Linking Gilmoure Drive's discontinuities, including through the Mary's Center property as well as the properties just east of Dennis Avenue.
- Linking Gilmoure Drive and Whitehall Street.
- Linking Whitehall Street and Breewood Road.
- Linking Edgewood Avenue and Whittington Terrace, passing through the Luther Rice Memorial Baptist Church site.
- Linking Whittington Terrace and Arcola Avenue, passing through the Northwood High School site.



Enclosure: Detailed Comments

cc: Claire Iseli, CEX
Debbie Spielberg, CEX
Meredith Wellington, CEX
Ken Hartman, CEX
Dale Tibbitts, CEX
Haley Peckett, MCDOT
Andrew Bossi, MCDOT

0		Team	Commenter	Printed Page	Summary	Comment
1			MLP	General	Syntax	Standardize the road description to "MD 193 (University Blvd)". Using differing versions from state version is confusing and unhelpful.
2		VZ	WH	Cover	Privacy	Blur the license plate numbers visible on the cover page.
3		VZ	WH	9	BRT & Driveway Impacts	1st Bullet - This may overstate the ability for a BRT project to consolidate, remove, or relocate a driveway. This would likely only occur through redevelopment or potentially scare people away from supporting a BRT project if they believe it will affect their home or business access to the road. Recommend removing, "or implementation of BRT" from the bullet.
4	*	**Policy**	**ADB**	**23-74**	**Zoning - Transpo Nexus**	**Consider some connection between expanded density and implementation of BRT, such as funding programmed within the 6-year CIP for construction of the master planned cross-section. This would help support the intended nexus of the Growth Corridor between density and non-auto mobility.**
5	*	Policy	SCP	23-74	Rezoning Ridership Gains	Is there any sense for how the proposed rezoning will increase population/activity, resulting in ridership gains for transit? This may be helpful information to include in the narrative.
6		Policy	ADB	25-28	Formatting	Consider adding a blank page between either between p22-23, or between p24-25, so that the two Land Use figures appear side-by-side, and the two zoning figures appear side-by-side.
7		Policy	ADB	25-26	Formatting	Align Figures 7 and 8 so that scrolling between them keeps them at the same scale.
8	*	Policy	SCP	87	Existing Impervious Surfaces	3rd Section, 2nd Bullet, "Minimize impervious surfaces in site designs for developing and redeveloping sites" Why limit the minimization of impervious surfaces for only new developments? If we are serious about sustainability we will likely also need to address the existing pervious areas through retrofits or programs to modify them to be more sustainable. (ADB) Consider rephrasing this line as something like "Minimize impervious surfaces in site designs for developing and redeveloping sites, as well as new capital projects and retrofits of existing conditions."
9		VZ	WH	88	Lighting	The goal of "promote an environment that minimizes light pollution," may be in conflict with the County's goal of providing pedestrian-level enhanced lighting along boulevards. Add language that encourages minimizing light pollution without sacrificing improved lighting for safety.
10	**	**Policy, Devel Rvw**	**ADB, RT**	**90-115**	**Transpo Analysis**	**Include some narrative toward the impacts of the road diet, or at least reference where in the Appendices additional information may be founded. It may be helpful to layreaders for the plan's narrative to summarize the findings of the analysis.** **We defer to MDOT SHA for comment on the transportation analysis, but caution that any substantial increases in delay -particularly without meaningful gains in transit mobility- may cause increased traffic along County roads such as Arcola Ave, Dennis Ave, Lanark Way, Sutherland Rd, Forest Glen Rd, and Edgewood Ave.**
11	*	VZ, Policy	WH, ADB	95-97, 106	Cross-Sections Footnote	Add a footnote to each page of cross-sections noting that these are simplifications of complex on-the-ground conditions, which include many varied obstacles that can result in some variation from what's shown.

0	Team	Commenter	Printed Page	Summary	Comment
12	Policy	ADB	96	Brunett Ave	Figure 67 - The 4' sidewalks are sub-standard and not compliant with our application of ADA. The 5' Planting Strips are also substandard, though that's just a matter of policy rather than law, so it's not as much a deal-breaker. Consider reallocating space from the outside buffer areas along the ROW lines over to the sidewalk, and perhaps also the planting strips. I recognize this cross-section's peculiarities are likely reflecting on-the-ground conditions, but the master plan should lay out the ideal long-term vision and we can adjust as-needed at implementation.
13	VZ	WH	98	Top 10 vs Top 5	2nd Paragraph, 4th Line - Should read top 10 instead of top 5
14	VZ	WH	98	Crash Data Years	Recommend excluding partial 2024 crash data as it is incomplete or stating what the cutoff date was.
15	VZ	WH	99	Illegible Symbols	Figure 71 - The symbols using text are difficult to read and may not be readable in a printed version. Consider using more colors or non-text symbols in the map.
16	DO	HP	100	Existing Bus Lane Treatments	3rd & 4th Bullets - While BRT is not envisioned in the short-term, improvements like closing medians and driveways will benefit bus operations in the near future along the existing bus lanes. Suggest that BRT is replaced with "BRT and near-term bus priority improvements." (What I want to convey is that even if BRT is not funded or prioritized, the suggested improvements are still needed for bus priority.)
17	VZ	WH	100	Phrasing	Change "avoid" to "reconsider" under " Avoid the use of multiple dedicated left- and right-turn lanes such as, dual right-turn lanes." While removing a turn lane can lower crossing distances, it increases cycle times to clear the same turn volume for a single lane. With longer signal times, ped/bike compliance lowers and can be higher risk than crossing an additional turn lane.

0		Team	Commenter	Printed Page	Summary	Comment
18	**	DO, Transit, BRT, Policy	HP, AW, JC, JH, JT, SCP, ADB	106, 114-115	Transit Lanes	We strongly recommend that dedicated bus lanes be provided through Four Corners. Bus lanes are among our top priorities through Four Corners, as this corridor already carries very high passenger volumes & provides important regional connectivity, and the higher densities proposed by the plan are justified on the basis of high quality bus services. This is the most congested part of Four Corners, so priority bus treatment is key for maintaining on-time performance and making transit a viable and desirable transportation option for the UBC. Without significant improvements to transit access, driving will remain the mode of choice in the UBC, which will undermine the Plan's goals of improving multimodal safety, livability, walkability, and bikeability. Transit lanes would boost the County's ability to meet the Plan Vision (p11) seeking to "leverage new transit infrastructure to reduce carbon emissions and advance the county's Climate Action Plan (CAP) goals", and also to support the Thrive 2050 goal to "make transit the fastest, most convenient, and most reliable way to travel" to activity centers. Appendix H (Financial Feasibility Assessment) states that "Potential for Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) in the area may enhance attractiveness for higher-density projects if the service is robust and accessible," and the Partners for Economic Solutions study states that BRT's ability to promote development depends partly on "measurable speed advantages over driving alone (e.g., dedicated bus lanes)." The absence of dedicated bus lanes in Four Corners would diminish these positive effects considerably.
19	**	DO, Transit, BRT, Policy	HP, AW, JC, JH, JT, SCP, ADB	106, 114-115	Transit Lanes	[previous comment, continued] If necessary for additional space: consider potential bikeway options parallel to University Blvd which might accommodate Breezeway-level design parameters. One such option might use Timberwood Avenue, transitioning at the west through North Four Corners Local Park, and at the east via Pierce Dr / Lexington Dr. Extending Sidewalks beyond the ROW may also help fit transit, bikeways, and walkways, though this could shift building frontages back and affect the visual nature of the roadway.
20		Policy	ADB	107-108	Graphics	If the plan intends for the long-term vision to become reality: consider expanding this section from 2 pages to more like 4-6 pages. Consider adding graphics to support the long-term vision's description. These will help ensure that the plan's intent is more clearly understood into the future.

0	Team	Commenter	Printed Page	Summary	Comment
21	BRT, Policy	JT, ADB	109-110	Table Formatting	(JT) Table 1 was split into two pages. The table on the second page does not have street names and segments like the first page, which makes it hard to discern the information, such as existing lanes and proposed lanes etc. (ADB) Either... - Add a blank page between before Table 1 so that these align across a two-page spread. - Shrink the columns so that the width fits fully within a page, then break up the table vertically across several pages (as has been done with all previous plans)
22	BRT	JT	109-110	Existing Traffic Lanes	Table 1 - Colesville Road within the Four Corners Town Center boundary (Timberwood Ave to Lanark Way) has 8 existing lanes instead of 6 lanes
23	BRT	JT	109-110	Existing Traffic Lanes	Table 1 - Colesville Road within the Town Center southern boundary to planning area boundary (460' south of Lanark Way) has 8 lanes instead of 6 lanes. NB has 4 thru lanes and SB 3 thru+1 auxiliary lane to I-495 ramp
24	BRT	JT	109-110	Existing & Proposed Traffic Lanes	Table 1 - University Boulevard within the Town Center boundary: none of the continuous turn lanes were accounted for. As is stated, it's somewhat misleading to suggest that there will be only 2 travel lanes in each direction with the repurposing of one travel lane (3 to 2 lanes in each direction). The turn lanes are continuous and part of the available public ROW.
25	BRT	JT	109-110	Existing & Proposed Traffic Lanes	Table 1 - University Boulevard WB Lexington Dr to Colesville Rd has 4 through lanes.
26	Policy	ADB	110	Minimum ROW Footnote	Add a footnote applicable to the Proposed Right of Way column with the following footnoted text: "Minimum rights-of-way do not include lanes for turning, parking, acceleration, deceleration, or other purposes auxiliary to through travel. Additional rights-of-way may also be needed to accommodate master planned bicycle and transit facilities, including Protected Intersections, the envelopes of transit stations, and pedestrian crossing refuges."
27	Transit	AW	111	Current Routes	Ride On Route 19 runs along University Blvd from Dennis Ave to the Beltway. Figure 76 shows it, but the plan text only mentions Routes 7, 8, and 9.
28	Transit	AW	111, Appendix F p2	Better Bus Route Numbers	If the plan will be adopted after June 29, then all Metrobus route numbers should be updated to reflect the new numbering scheme under Better Bus: https://www.wmata.com/initiatives/plans/Better-Bus/upload/Resource_2025-Route-Profiles_Maryland.pdf
29	Transit	AW	112	Ride On Reimagined	Ride On Reimagined was formally adopted in December 2024, so the description should be updated.

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30	**	**DO, Transit, BRT, Policy**	**HP, AW, JC, JH, JT, SCP, ADB**	**115**	**Transit Lanes**	**5th Bullet - The language should be modified to allow for flexibility in providing future bus lanes through Four Corners. Consider the following phrasing (edits underlined):** **>>> Study options for improving transit performance through Four Corners from Lorain Avenue to Lexington Drive as part of a long-term comprehensive redesign of the intersection of University Boulevard and Colesville Road. Improving multimodal safety and access—not increasing general vehicle capacity or vehicular travel speeds through Four Corners—should remain the top priority of the study; as such, pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements, including a human scale and reduced pedestrian crossing distances, a Breezeway that connects to bicycle and pedestrian facilities along University Boulevard, and ample street buffers should remain part of the long-term vision. <<<**
31		Policy	ADB	116	Graphics	Consider a more diverse palette for the Bikeway Tiers than greyscale lines on a greyscale map.
32		Policy	ADB	118	Map Labels	Figure 118 - Consider adding small textual labels by each Recommended Crossing to clearly identify what cross-street each marker aligns with.
33	**	Policy	ADB	119, 121	Ped/Bike Connection	Show a Planned Hard Surface (p119) and Trail (p121) lines linking Gilmoure Dr's discontinuities, including through the Mary's Center property as well as the properties just east of Dennis Ave. Designate this corridor parallel along University's south side as a Shared Road bikeway.
34	**	Policy	ADB	119, 121	Ped/Bike Connection	Show a Planned Hard Surface (p119) and Trail (p121) lines linking Gilmoure Dr and Whitehall St, as well as Whitehall St and Breewood Rd. Designate this corridor parallel along University's south side as a Shared Road bikeway.
35	**	Policy	ADB	119, 121	Ped/Bike Connection	Show a Planned Hard Surface (p119) and Trail (p121) lines linking Edgewood Ave and Whittington Ter, passing through the Luther Rice Memorial Baptist Church site. Designate this corridor parallel along University's north side as a Shared Road bikeway.
36	**	Policy	ADB	119, 121	Ped/Bike Connection	Show a Planned Hard Surface (p119) and Trail (p121) lines linking Whittington Ter and Arcola Ave, passing through the Northwood HS site. Designate this corridor parallel along University's north side as a Shared Road bikeway.
37	**	Policy	ADB	121	US 29 Breezeway Discontinuity	The US 29 Breezeway snakes around a lot through Four Corners. Consider whether this plan can help provide a more direct north-south path through the area.
38		Policy	ADB	122	Bikeshare / Micromobility Map	Consider adding a map with locations (a) through (k) marked on it, as well as the areas identified under the Micromobility Recommendations.
39		VZ	WH	141	Safe Streets & Roads for All Reference	The 3rd paragraph last sentence references "MDOT's Safe Streets and Roads for All initiative," but I believe the intended reference is for USDOT's Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A). If the intention is to reference an MDOT initiative, could replace SS4A with SHA's Pedestrian Safety Action Plan (PSAP).
40		VZ	WH	145	MDOT SHA Lead	Table 2 - The majority of these items should have MDOT SHA as the lead. MCDOT cannot do anything to University Blvd without SHA's approval including new street connections, repurposing travel lanes, removing right-turn lanes, signalizing, etc.
41		Policy	ADB	Appx	Table of Contents	Consider adding a Table of Contents as the first page in the Appendix file.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Marc Elrich
County Executive

Christopher R. Conklin
Director

MEMORANDUM

March 28, 2025

TO: Artie Harris, Chair
Montgomery County Planning Board

FROM: Haley Peckett, Deputy Director, Transportation Policy and Planning
Department of Transportation
Haley Peckett (Mar 28, 2025 12:28 EDT)

SUBJECT: University Boulevard Corridor Plan
Public Hearing Draft – Department of Transportation Comments Follow-up

Thank you for the opportunity to review the January 2025 Public Hearing Draft of the University Boulevard Corridor Plan. We provided an initial comment memo on March 14, 2025. Through subsequent conversations with Planning staff, we recognize these comments may have generated some confusion. Therefore, we would like to clarify and provide the following additional thoughts:

1) **TRANSIT LANES IN FOUR CORNERS:** The preliminary Planning Department recommendations that generated our comments propose reallocating existing road space for a Breezeway to accommodate bicycle travel. Our suggestion in response to this recommendation is that ***if*** a reallocation of space is viable, it would be preferable to provide this space for transit since accommodating both a Breezeway and transit lanes within existing right-of-way is probably not possible.

   Transit already carries thousands of travelers through this corridor and providing additional capacity for this mode would benefit these users and encourage growth in transit use. Further, use of road space for transit would be helpful for future implementation of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), which appears to be a cornerstone of the plan recommendations. It is known that new trip making in this plan area will not be entirely locally served by walking and biking, and transit provides the best option for these trips that would otherwise be hard to accommodate on the proposed network as automobile trips.

   Our comments are meant to convey that MCDOT wants to see transit prioritized through this constrained corridor. We strongly support the master-planned BRT approved in 2013 but recognize that the BRT is, to date, unfunded with no assurance of future funding or a

timeline for planning, design, or construction. We also hope to keep open the possibility of studying multiple configurations through Four Corners, without predisposing any conclusions or eliminating options at this early stage. While it would be desirable along corridors with heavy transit usage and a master-planned BRT corridor to have dedicated bus lanes to the greatest extent feasible, it would be premature to recommend that bus lanes be installed without sufficient study and community dialogue. The University Boulevard and Colesville Road intersection is one of the most challenging intersections in the County, with high volumes of vehicles trying to access I-495. The future study should ensure that the corridor works for all users, while prioritizing multimodal safety and transit operations.

Our 3/14/25 memo also included several cross-sections, which were not meant to predispose a decision or necessitate inclusion in a study. Rather, these cross-sections were only intended to illustrate how the corridor might balance competing needs within constrained rights-of-way.

2) **BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN FACILITIES:** When considering tradeoffs across modes, pedestrians need safe sidewalk access along all roadways. Buses and through-vehicles should not divert through residential streets. However, given the limitations of the University Boulevard Corridor, bicycles and the proposed breezeway may be better suited along a different corridor, particularly near Four Corners. This would mirror the approach the Bicycle Master Plan took for the bicycle facilities proposed for US 29 within the Four Corners Area. There was a recognition that the available space along US 29 was not sufficient and incorporating the desired bike facility would have serious impacts, so the proposed facility parallels US 29.

3) **ZONING – TRANSPORTATION NEXUS:** MCDOT believes that there should be a strong connection between transportation and any future consideration of density. We are not commenting on whether the plan's recommendation for density align with the community's vision for their neighborhoods, but if density is added without realistic solutions that offer a viable alternative to driving, people will have no choice but to drive, further degrading traffic operations and environmental conditions, given the current transportation options in the corridor.

cc: Debbie Spielberg, CEX
Claire Iseli, CEX
Meredith Wellington, CEX
Ken Hartman, CEX
Dale Tibbitts, CEX
Corey Pitts, MCDOT
Andrew Bossi, MCDOT